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**Health Officials Offer Comprehensive Tips for Preventing Summer Illness & Injury**  
*May 22-28, 2017 is Healthy and Safe Swimming Week*

(Richmond, Va.)— This time of year marks the unofficial start of summer with the opening of pools and water parks. As water temperatures rise, so do visits to Virginia’s beaches, lakes and rivers. The week leading up to Memorial Day is designated Healthy and Safe Swimming Week (HSSW) in Virginia and the nation. HSSW focuses on the steps everyone can take to have a healthy and safe swimming experience.

“Swimming and other recreational water activities offer us a chance to not only have fun but also to maintain and retain our health,” said **State Health Commissioner Marissa J. Levine, MD, MPH, FAAFP**. “However, it’s important to remember that pools and open waters are not without danger. Sadly, from May 27 – June 5 of last year, there were five accidental drownings in Virginia. I urge each of us to do our part for a safe and healthy summer by exercising caution before enjoying a day by the water.”

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) reminds us that we all play a role in preventing water-related illnesses and injuries. Learn how to stay safe in the [pool](#), [natural waters](#) and from [water injuries](#).

## **Pool**

Water attractions can pose a risk of illness caused by germs. Water illnesses in the pool are spread through:

- swallowing water,
- inhaled through cooling mists,
- hot tubs, or
- in water play areas such as splash pads and interactive fountains.

*Cryptosporidium* is a microscopic parasite that can cause gastrointestinal illness. It can survive a week in chlorinated pools.

Disinfectants, such as chlorine, do not kill germs right away. This is why it’s important to take simple steps to keep the pool safe. Disinfectants are important for maintaining pool water quality. In the US, more than 3,000 emergency room visits are from incorrect use of pool chemicals each year. Here’s how you can reduce illnesses and injuries in and around the pool:

- Stay out of the water if you have diarrhea.
- Practice proper personal hygiene.
- Don’t swallow the water.
- Every hour take kids on bathroom breaks. Change diapers in the restroom, not poolside, to keep germs away from the pool.
- Read and follow directions on pool chemical product labels.
- Wear appropriate safety equipment (goggles, for example) when handling pool chemicals.
- Secure pool chemicals to protect people, particularly children and animals, from accidental exposure.
- NEVER add pool chemicals when the pool is in use, and only add them poolside when directed by the product label.

For other helpful tips and a chemical pool safety guide, visit [www.SwimHealthyVA.com](http://www.SwimHealthyVA.com).

## **Natural Waters**

Natural bodies of water such as lakes, rivers, and oceans are home to diverse organisms. This includes germs and potentially harmful algae.

Gastrointestinal illness is the most common type of illness caused by germs. Symptoms include:

- nausea,
- vomiting, or
- diarrhea.

Algae is naturally occurring in natural waters. Algae can ‘bloom’ when they become too abundant. Most types of algae are not harmful. Some algae produce toxins which can make you sick, they can cause:

- skin irritation,
- diarrhea and stomach pain,
- and numbness or tingling.

Other symptoms associated with recreational water illnesses may include:

- eye, skin, or respiratory irritation, and
- ear or wound infections.

If water is muddy, stagnant, fowl-smelling, or is a strange color you should avoid contact. **When in doubt, stay out!** Other tips for swimming safe in natural waterways include:

- Look for beach advisory signs along public access points or along the beach. Many public beaches in Virginia are monitored for bacteria levels. An advisory is posted if these levels are too high. If the beach is under advisory, stay out of the water.
- All natural bodies of water contain bacteria, including salt water. Salty water will not disinfect wounds. If you have broken skin, stay out of the water.
- Avoid swimming in natural waters for at least three days after heavy rain.
- Don’t swim when you are sick. You can spread germs in the water and make other people sick.
- Avoid getting water up your nose. Use a nose clip or plug your nose before going under the water.
- If you become sick after being in the water, report your water activities to your doctor.
- Shower with soap and water before and after swimming.
- Keep children and pets from swimming in scummy water. If you see mats of algae or discolored green, red, or brown water, an algae bloom may be present.
- Report harmful algal blooms (HAB) or large groups of dead fish to the HAB Hotline at:
  - 888-238-6154 or [Submit an online report](#).

## **Safe Swimming Begins with Smart Swimming**

Every day, two children under 14 years old die from drowning. Drowning is the leading cause of injury and death for children ages 1-4 years. To keep swimmers safe in the water:

- Make sure everyone knows how to swim.
- Use life jackets.
- Provide continuous attentive supervision near swimmers.
- Know CPR. [Find a class near you](#).
- Use sunscreen. Apply sunscreen before applying insect repellent.
- Install and maintain barriers like 4-sided fencing and weight-bearing pool covers.
- Use locks or alarms for pool access points.

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